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BOOK REVIEW

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Book Reviewed: *Ismāʻīlī Movement in Sindh, Multan and Gujrat*

Jan Damani

Studies on the history of *Satpanth* (*literally. true path*) tradition of Ismāʻīlīsm are extremely rare. The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), London, which is globally renowned as the publication hub of Ismāʻīlī studies, has failed to compile even a single petite volume on this subject. The matter becomes crystal clear when a glance is thrown at efforts by individual scholars like Dr. G. A. Allana, who have tirelessly worked to compile whatsoever knowledge they could afford in the form of various books. Published in 2010 by Mehran Publishers, Karachi, the book *Ismāʻīlī Movement in Sindh, Multan and Gujrat* is one of the masterpieces inscribed by Dr. G. A. Allana. Available at economical rates, this book is a fascinating read for all those who wish to extend their knowledge about the origin, evolution and historical development of the Ismāʻīlī tradition across South Asian regions.

The book is divided into eight chapters and each of them is closely allied with the other ones. In the beginning chapter, Allana briefly explores the history of Sindh from the time of Indus Valley Civilization upto the Soomra dynasty. He also sheds light on the origin of the *Ismāʻīlī Daʻwa* (*literally. invitation*) and its subsequent spread to various regions of South Asia. In doing so, he makes a brief mention of different Ismāʻīlī pīrs and dāʻīs who operated in a diverse number of South Asian regions to propagate the Ismāʻīlī message. The author, particularly in this chapter, has rightly remained highly critical of Dr. Farhad Daftary for not including substantial material on the Satpanth Ismāʻīlī tradition in any of his Ismāʻīlī history books published by the IIS.

In the following chapter, the author first provides the readers with glimpses of three historical periods from the eventful history of the Ismāʻīlīs and then proceeds to the contemporary state of the community. The Ismāʻīlī historical periods considered by the author are Faṭimid, Alamūt and Post-Alamūt. However, he has omitted the initial two periods of the Ismāʻīlī history viz. Arabian and Syrian (*Satr*). After briefly describing socioeconomic and political aspects of the aforementioned periods, the author takes into account the achievements of the Ismāʻīlī Imāms during the Aga Khan period in the fields as diverse as education, health, economy, culture, architecture etc. All of this reminds us of the great contributions that the Ismāʻīlīs and their Imāms have continued to make to date for the cause of humanity in general, and the Islamic world in particular.

Allana has consumed around sixty pages of this book to highlight the contributions that the Ismāʻīlī intellectuals, scientists, scholars, dāʻīs, pīrs etc., have made throughout history. What is interesting to note about this chapter is that he has also included notes on those contemporary community individuals and scholars; like, Dr. Farhad Daftary, Mumtaz Ali Tajdin Sadik Ali, Dr. Abu Aly Aziz etc., of whom he remains predominantly critical in the same book. This is a fine embodiment of humility and a clear demonstration of the great influence of the teachings of the Aga Khan IV over his followers. Nevertheless; there are so many other notable Ismāʻīlī figures—for instance, Dr. Ali S. Asani, Dr. Shafique N. Virani, Pyarali Jiwa etc.—of whom no mention has been made by the author—of course; the author could name a few only in a brief chapter.

It is the fourth and fifth chapter from which the author starts the main discourse on the Satpanth tradition of the Ismāʻīlīs. He maintains that the term Satpanth was coined by Satgur Nūr, the first Ismāʻīlī pīr to arrive in the Indian subcontinent from Iran. As correctly pointed out by the author, the teachings of Satpanth tradition are immensely diverse. They are a mix of different philosophies that have shaped the tradition over the course of its long history. Therefore, the author is justified in mentioning only a few broad aspects of the tradition. Allana rightly sees the influence of Ṣūfī, Bhaktī, Sant, Vedic and many other mystic traditions on the shaping of the Ismāʻīlī tradition in the form of Satpanth. Outlining a broad context for readers in which the Satpanth tradition must be seen in the first place, the author correctly emphasizes on the need of new scholarship on this subject.

Unlike most of the scholars who think of the term Ginān as being a derivative from the Sanskrit root *Gyān*, Allana doubts this derivation; rather comes up with an entirely different opinion. For him; the word Ginān is neither a derivative from the Sanskrit root Gyān, nor a word that is a corrupted form of any other word. In fact, he strictly admits that Ginān is an original word which comes from the language of the Indus Valley Civilization in which it literally meant 'chant hymns'. Another surprising stance of the author comes in the form of his belief that Ṣadar al-Dīn, one of the many Ismāʻīlī pīrs upon whom he has

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written in this book, did not come from Iran, rather took birth in Ucch Sharif, located in modern day province of Punjab, Pakistan. This view is also in sharp contradistinction with the long held stance that the said pīr was sent from Iran by the Ismā'īlī Imām then residing in the same region.

As far as the poetic and prosodic form of the Ginān is concerned, Allana criticizes Ali S. Asani for his viewpoint on this subject. Unlike Asani, Allana maintains that only the ginān of Satgur Nūr are in the Doḥā meter, while the rest of the compositions by other pīrs and Saiyyds are in Kāfī or Jhūlnā form. Whatever the opinion of the author may be, the musical aspect of the Ginān tradition—chiefly the melodies (rāgs) associated with different compositions—still requires a significant amount of research. Allana nicely highlights the thematic complexity and rich linguistic diversity apparent in the Ginān. In this regard, he also criticizes Kamaluddin Ali Muhammad, a senior Ismā'īlī *Wā'eẓ* (*literally. sermonizer or preacher*), for distorting the original Ginānic vocabulary and melodies while transliterating and translating them into Urdu language. The author here presents the view of a pious enthusiastic Ismā'īlī who could not critically evaluate the necessity of the work of the wā'eẓ with respect to the religious climate of Pakistan. The relevant guidelines provided in chapter six collectively lead an individual towards an in-depth study of the ginānic literature.

At any rate, the author spends the final two chapters in discussing the origin, role and evolution of the *Khojkī* script. In this regard, there is no doubt that the previous works of the author are pioneering and have been quoted by all subsequent scholars of the field. Allana has perfectly shown in the form of excavations available from Bhambore, one of the possible origins of the Khojkī script. He rightly maintains that the Khojkī script is a modified form of the once-used Lohānkī script; and this modification was done by Ṣadar al-Dīn—an Ismā'īlī pīr who is also reported to have converted the Hindu Lohānās to the Ismā'īlī form of Islam.

The author concludes the book by providing two similar lists of the accessible compositions from the Ginān literature as appendixes. Although the book is not error free in terms of grammar, vocabulary, typos and claims made; however, it is praise worthy effort by Dr. G. A. Allana. It induces readers to read more on the Satpanth tradition, and; at the same time, also motivates scholars to conduct further academic research which this field still requires.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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